

Cromarty Fisheries



THE CROMARTY FIRTH FISHERY BOARD MINUTES OF PROPRIATORS MEETING

Held at Torr Achilty on Thursday 29th June 2017 at 11am

Present		In Attendance	
Ian Duncan (Convener)	ID	Simon McKelvey (Director)	SM
Col. Alastair Campbell (Vice Convener)	AC	Edward Rush (Head Bailiff)	ER
Dr. Alistair Stephen (SSE)	AS	The Earl of Aylesford (Scatwell Estate)	EA
Dave Smith (Evanton Angling Club)	DS	Troels Barnhoi (Strathconon Estate)	TB
Neil Wright (Clerk)	NW (C)	Saunders Campbell (Netsman)	SC
		Richard Fyfe (SEPA)	RF
		Andrew Matheson (Conon Fishing Syndicate)	AM
		Ivan Munro (Alness Angling Club)	IM
		Ronald Munro Ferguson (Novar Estate)	RMF
		Ian Paterson (Netsman)	IP
		Rick Page (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	RP
		William Paterson (Netsman)	WP
		George Skinner (Netsman)	GS
		Sandra Skinner (Netsman)	SS
		William Skinner (Netsman)	WS
		John Urquhart (Dingwall & District Angling Club)	JU
		Roddy d' Anyers Willis (Conon Fishing Syndicate - Brahan Beat)	RW

1	APOLOGIES	Action
	<p>Andrew Humphries (Lemlair) Ben Leyshon (SNH) Calum MacDonald (Contin Glebe, Blackwater) Neil McInnes (Forestry Commission Scotland) Okain McLennan (Loch Achonachie Angling Club) Christina Pirie (Alness Angling Club)</p>	
2	MINUTES OF THE MEETING 17TH FEBRUARY 2017	
	<p>ID commented that that the Rivers and Lochs Institute's proposed works will no longer be progressed, mainly due cost and possible changes to the Alness Weir (which will be discussed later in the meeting).</p> <p>The attendees were asked if they had any amendments or comments on the minutes from the meeting held on the 17th February 2017.</p> <p>IP noted that under the Conservation Policy, his initials had been incorrectly listed against paragraphs 7 and 11. IP proceeded to read out these paragraphs to the meeting. NW responded that IP was correct and they should have WP rather than IP against them.</p> <p>IP addressed the Chairman with a prepared statement regarding a claimed omission from the previous minutes. IP restated his question to the Chairman and commented that after a robust debate with the Director, Chairman and angling representatives of the Board at the last meeting, he asked the Chairman whether the Cromarty Firth Fishery Board was a Board for anglers or was it representing all, including netsmen? IP continued that the Chairman, who also chaired the previous meeting, answered that it was an angling board. If this is an angling board, should its activities be limited to the Firth up to the Souters, with no sea patrols outside the estuary from the Board? The Board also owns and lets coastal netting rights which were fished until the moratorium. IP has received catch records for every fishery in Scotland from 1952 to 2016 from Marine Scotland; they covered mostly bag nets and fixed engines. All the figures for this area can be checked and they are listed under the Conon District. Surely we should have clarification from the Chairman and the Board as to where we stand as you cannot have an angling Board if it also contains nettings? IP asked the Chairman to comment on his interpretation of this.</p> <p>ID stated that, in his view, angling encompasses all forms of fishing, included netting and although the coastal netsmen are not being required to pay assessments during the moratorium (as they are unable to net), they are still part of the Board.</p> <p>GS commented that the Board is here to represent the lower and upper proprietors but he felt the Board was not doing enough for the lower proprietors.</p> <p>ID responded that there was not much more that could be done at present. GS noted that the Kyle of Sutherland Fishery Board do far more for their netsmen. ID could not comment on the Kyle of Sutherland Fishery Board operations but the Board does operate sea patrols and the Bailiffs do look for illegal nets. GS referenced Lord Nickson's Board from 10 years ago and commented that it was half the size it is now and there was representation for both lower and upper proprietors; it is now mainly anglers from the upper.</p>	

<p>ID responded to GS by outlining it is up to the proprietors to attend and everyone in the room pays assessments, save for netsmen during the moratorium. Each member is equal in status, whether upper or lower. Each member can come to the Board and ask any question or request assistance.</p> <p>IP commented that the previous statement by ID is not the same as his comments from the February Board meeting where it is an angling Board. ID disagreed by responding that he considered there to be little misunderstanding in the use of the term 'angling'. IP stated that there was a big difference as netsmen have had to stop while anglers have been allowed to continue. ID commented that the Board could not change the law but to the extent that the Board is able to represent the netsmen, they are happy to do so. IP responded to say that he did not feel the Board was representing the netsmen. ID asked what else the Board could do that they were not already doing. IP stated that at meeting after meeting it was requested that "Netsmen" be added to the agenda, and this was requested through SM, but it did not happen. SM responded by saying that they can raise issues now or at any meeting. IP stated that that was not the point.</p> <p>SC interceded and commented that he had been part of the Board for 40 years and it used to be a statutory requirement for three upper proprietors, three lower, plus the Chairman and the Clerk. That was the total number for the Board. ID commented that the requirements had changed but, in any event he liked to run an open meeting rather than have only seven people representing all. ID further felt that anyone who pays rates has the right to attend the meeting and a right to ask questions, even if it is not a specific item on the agenda. They can ask under 'Any Other Business' and there is 'Matters Arising' from the previous minutes. Anyone who wishes to raise a legitimate question can do so and the Board will do its best to answer. Rather than get into technicalities of angling and netsmen, everyone has a right to speak.</p> <p>RMF commented that ninety percent of the work done by the Board is looking after the river, the fish, the fry and the restocking and that is what matters; eventually the fish come back and can be caught by anglers and the netsmen. It is a matter of looking after the river and all the work that is done by the Board is very good and also benefits the netsmen.</p> <p>SM commented that there has been a change in legislation and there are no longer defined upper and lower proprietors; everyone can now be represented at a Board meeting. GS asked why there has been a change. SM responded that netting used to be economically important to Scotland but this has reduced over the last twenty years. There has been a change in attitude towards mixed stock fisheries and the Board has to act within the law. ID repeated that he does encourages robust debate and discussion; anything relevant can be raised by anyone present.</p> <p>ID asked the Board if there were any other items to be raised on the previous minutes. WP wished to comment on the low number of eggs in the new hatchery. As reported at the last meeting, he had commented that the hatchery used to carry six million eggs. A report from the Conon District Salmon Fishery Board dated 1988 was handed to the Chairman to be read out so that the Board could understand the changes. WP further commented that the moratorium</p>
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lasts another two years and he would like to see the hatchery and the rivers stocked to full capacity in order to aid the netmen in two years.

SM commented that 1988-89 had seen a bumper grilse run for the period but by 1991 this had significantly reduced; stocks naturally go up and down.

AS commented that a lot of the six million eggs would have been sold rather than put back into the river system.

ID read out the report from 1988-1989 which had been introduced to the meeting by WP and is attached to these minutes.

AS commented on the report read out by ID stating that both the law and the science have changed in respect of hatcheries and eggs; taking large quantities of eggs and selling them does not work any more. The then Hydro Board at the time did not pay the Fishery Board any money and so the sale of eggs was seen as a way of raising funds. This has now changed and SSE pay for works carried out on its behalf. It is no longer legal to shoot mergansers, goosanders and seals despite that being one thing that could help maximise the survival of smolts going out to sea. SM has shown that in dry spring years you are losing 50% of your smolts before they have got to the sea and that is one of the problems leading to lack of adults coming back. This has been compounded by the fact marine survival has crashed compared to 20 – 30 years ago. SM doesn't just get a million eggs and then stop; staff catch as many fish for the hatchery as they can, but fish are just not there in sufficient numbers to be caught. SM commented that out of the 6 million eggs in the 1988-1989 report, only one million went back into the river. In some years more than a million eggs are collected and they are all going back into the river, which would mean more are being released than in 1988-89.

WP asked if there used to be six million eggs in the hatchery. SM responded that on occasions there were but that was at the peak of the cycle of high grilse runs with large number of grilse returning. This has changed enormously to the extent that grilse did not turn up in large numbers last year; fisheries used to seeing around ten thousand fish got virtually nothing last year. We are going into a phase of less grilse and increasing numbers of spring fish. If you look back at the records, there are rarely large grilse and spring fish numbers in the same year and we are at a tipping point between those two time periods. Ron Campbell has demonstrated this very clearly on the Tweed. The fish are just not there at the moment. GS enquired as to how many eggs were in the hatchery. SM responded that just under a million eggs were in the hatchery last year and they all went back into the river system. ID commented that so many things have changed, for instance holding pens are no longer used and malachite green has been banned.

JU stated that it has been confirmed again today that there is an issue with smolts getting out to sea. There has been a serious amount of money spent on the river system trying to help parr and fry but we should also be trying to protect smolts on their route out in order to help them come back to the river system in larger numbers. AS commented that the results of the acoustic tagging, which were presented at the last meeting, showed that twenty five percent of smolts were lost before they were getting to Dingwall.

However, we were surprised by the lack of predation between Dingwall and the Souters; they then seemed to be going very fast in an easterly direction along a route close to the south coast of the Firth not previously known. The key seems to be managing anything that will harm them in the river and getting them safely out of the river.

ID commented further that the River Deveron had carried out smolt tagging research as they had thought their greatest mortalities were at sea; they found that sixty percent mortality existed before the smolts reached the estuary. JU asked what could be done about it. SM responded that there are a number of things that can be done, but they all need to be within the law. Each year a licence application to scare goosanders and mergansers is made and the Board does everything that it can. There has been research in the last three years that has identified a problem with smolts getting out of lochs; the Board does have a plan that is being discussed with AS to improve this on some of the tributaries.

IP stated that the new thinking is that you should not have hatcheries. SM responded that it is pretty well demonstrated that hatcheries in most circumstances are counterproductive. In systems like the Conon, where you have man-made obstacles which create areas that fish cannot get to in order to spawn, hatcheries can work. There are two types of hatchery, enhancement and mitigation; the latter where you are trying to mitigate against an obstacle and this is where salmon cannot get past naturally. AS commented that the Spey used to have a big hatchery that they have wound back to virtually nothing as they recognised there was no benefit to stocking evidenced by research through tagging. The Tweed hasn't had a hatchery for decades and the Tay are winding back their hatchery. The Conon is unique as it has had productive areas that have been made less so by the Hydro scheme; if we do not keep on stocking there is a risk parts of the fishery would collapse. IP commented that the RAFTS report suggested that releasing smolts was a bad idea. AS responded that this is why the hatchery run by SM mimics the natural environment as much as possible and only eggs are put back into the river to allow for natural selection and fish going to sea are as near to wild as you can make them; this is a very different method to some hatcheries. ID commented that the evidence suggests fish that survive best in a hatchery environment are not the ones that survive best in the wild, which is generally accepted now. Without the dams the CFFB would, in all likelihood, not have a hatchery. SM agreed with this statement as there would be no justification and the way legislation is heading, hatcheries are increasingly likely to become licensed and it may become very difficult to run a hatchery unless you can justify it in the future.

RW suggested that protecting smolts at the estuary is not unlike protecting grouse chicks and eggs from ravens, which is a large problem. During a short period in May and June, more manpower is required in order to scare these birds off the hill, but which is a small cost. During the four to five week period of the smolt run, would it be worth asking for volunteers to keep sawbills on the move at the estuary? This is carried out on the North Esk with gas guns and anything else available in order to keep them moving, at probably a small cost. They would undoubtedly be saving a huge number of smolts. SM responded that the Board already obtains licences to scare. Ghillies are given licence at the beginning of the smolt run and are encouraged to scare as many as possible. ID commented, noting

RW's point, that it is generally accepted that the population of ravens is increasing and he noted that there has been a larger number of goosander at Kildermorie this year and it appears that the population is growing.

WP stated that prior to the egg sales, all of the eggs were put back into the river and that is why there were such high grilse runs during the 1960s and into the early 1970s, when this changed and the eggs were being sold it was to try and balance the books. ID commented that the statistics show there were more grilse around and that is not just the CFFB hatchery that demonstrates this. WP suggested that, in his grandfather's time, it was mainly salmon being caught and the hatcheries increased the grilse run. There are two sides, the first being the angler catching fish in the river and the second being the netting. The netting required the rivers to be stocked to a maximum to allow the nets to produce the amount of fish they do. AS wished to respond and stated that each river has its maximum carrying capacity and it cannot produce any more smolts than a pre-determined amount; no matter how many eggs are added, it will still produce the same amount or the more you put in you reach the point of diminishing returns and the less you may get out of it. The majority of the smolts being produced on the River Conon are on the Blackwater. The maximum likely production is around thirty five thousand smolts. At the time that WP was catching large numbers of grilse, the marine mortality rate was twenty five percent i.e. for every one hundred smolts going to sea you got twenty five back. AS believes that the Blackwater is still producing thirty five thousand smolts and it takes around a million eggs to stock it. Marine survival has dropped to around five smolts for every one hundred. This is a dramatic drop and it is why there are less grilse returning. WP disagreed and believes that more eggs are required because of predation by seals and everything else. SM responded that the carrying capacity of the river will not allow more smolts to be produced as it is determined by the food available. Across Scotland the range for smolts is from one-two per hundred square meters up to ten and it will not go much further than that. WP stated that if you plant potatoes in a field you will get a known crop back. The only way to know that you will get a large grilse run back is to stock the rivers to maximum. SM referred to an example of a field with sheep and stated that a grass field can only support so many sheep; this is the same as a river. Over-stocking would have a detrimental effect on sheep or smolts.

SM stated that where habitat has been improved, such as above the Meig, the carrying capacity should increase. Fish going through the Meig Dam a few years ago numbered about four hundred, which has now increased to seven hundred. Research being carried out by Glasgow University, where nutrient bags are being added to the river to mimic salmon that would naturally die, has shown that there is increased smolt production in those areas. Not only are there more fish surviving but the genetic diversity of the fish is greatly increased. Where the nutrients were poor, only one or two families were surviving; where nutrients had been restored, more families survived. It is important to concentrate on things that can be achieved.

SC has not seen many fish for some time in his netting station but believes that the fish for the hatchery should be caught a month earlier. AS responded that this has been considered but the main problem is the pens; they cause sores for the fish due to the

	<p>concrete and the wire; this used to be able to be treated with malachite green to stop infection but the substance is now banned. Modern tanks are much smoother and are now used. SM responded that they were going to try and take fish earlier and treat them with salt to limit infection.</p> <p>ER commented that he remembers the season of 1988 and the proportion of salmon to grilse. This has now gone down to one to one. Due to the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act hatcheries cannot stock above impassable objects without a licence.</p> <p>SM stated that the River Bran has not been stocked for a number of years but there were four thousand smolts recorded last year and these are all from wild spawning, which has been a great success</p>	
3	MATTERS ARISING	
	Covered in the above.	
4	YEAR-END FIGURES 2016/17	
	<p>ID commented on the year-end figures, stating that income of £256,000 had been budgeted but just over £280,000 was achieved. The primary difference was more money from SSE and, thanks to SM, a £10,000 increase in contract work. In terms of cashflow income the Government Gilts had matured, which will not re-occur. The expenditure side was budgeted for £260,000 meaning that it was planned that there would be a small deficit of £4,000 but because of the better income, plus we managed to control the expenditure to £248,000, there was a surplus for the year of £32,000. That is not considered to be repeatable largely due to the reduction in contract work which SM will explain.</p> <p>ID asked the Board if they had any comments regarding the accounts to the prior year-end. There were no comments or questions. He explained that the full the statutory accounts were not yet ready for signing as there was still detailed work required.</p> <p>AS enquired if the purchase order for SSE had been received. NW responded that it had not yet been received but asked AS if he could email it to him.</p>	
5	DIRECTORS REPORT	
	<p>SM reported that there is a continuing trend for more multi sea wintered fish and fewer grilse. Although there has been a good start to the year, it is unknown if that will continue. There has been a long term decline in numbers, similar to the difference between weather and climate, but it is too early to tell and from the reports from around the rest of the country, there are no large quantities of grilse arriving yet.</p> <p>Marine Scotland Science have updated the model used to support their conservation policy and they have recalculated the number of fish in a river system. In the past they used the exploitation rates from rod catches. This year they have taken the exploitation rate of the River Helmsdale, which has a higher exploitation rate, and this will be applied to all the northern rivers. This means for all the Cromarty Firth rivers that the calculated numbers of fish returning will be much lower. It is yet to be seen how this will affect the conservation policy but it is likely that some rivers will be downgraded. ID wished to stress that at the outset it was generally thought the grading was too tough and there was criticism of that</p>	

basis of calculation; this then swung in the opposite direction and almost every river became grade one. It is unlikely that every one will remain grade one but this calculation is more realistic and the grading will be more accurate, even if not yet perfect.

SM continued that there is a very busy research programme this year with a lot of smolt tagging through Marine Scotland Science and Glasgow University. There is an acoustic tracking programme that is running at the moment and there has been tagging on the River Meig, the River Bran and the Blackwater. It is anticipated that four thousand smolts will be tagged this year. There is still concern regarding the survival of smolts though the Meig reservoir. AS asked when the work on the most recent acoustic tagging might be available. SM responded that the receivers were being lifted that day and there was a huge amount of data to go through but there might be some initial results in about a month's time. Final analysis of fish behaviour will take longer to work out.

SM commented that the Bailiffs were busy again this year, including doing more tree planting work. The Trust has been very involved with the schools programme and the schools around Alness are at last engaging with the programme. There has been funding for the angling programme from the Fairburn windfarm. The schools have produced reports and videos from the programme and if approvals are given by the schools and parents, they will be put on the CFFB website.

The CFFB has been asked to become involved with pit tagging up at Armadale, with acoustic buoys being placed at the mouth of all relevant rivers with the idea of identifying where the fish end up. IP commented that he believed it was a waste of money. AS responded that it is a large expenditure of £440,000. IP stated that the project proposal locations have moved around and it has settled on Armadale. Seven hundred and fifty fish are to be tagged but it is likely they will only locate about 4% at most. SS commented that there seemed to be a consensus that this is not the most effective science moving forward. Have there been any scientists who have made representations to the Scottish Government to protest against this science or to try to tell them what would be a more appropriate method, and if not, why not? ID agreed with SS's comments. SM responded that this approach had been agreed with Marine Scotland Science and the Salmon Netting Association with it being a bi-lateral agreement. It will provide information and it will test out the array of acoustic buoys around the coast. SS responded that it is easy to say it will produce something but should individuals and groups not be standing up and advising on the best way forward rather than just leaving it, especially if it is public funds being used? SM commented that we would have to see what the outcome of the project was but the long term aim of having acoustic buoys around the country could be very useful. ID commented that there will be some value from the project but noted the money could probably have been better spent. SS felt that it probably wasn't right that we sit and do nothing considering that it is public funds. AS commented that he had only heard about the project a couple of days prior to this meeting and he also believed the money could have been better utilised. SM noted that this is a Scottish Government research programme and it is not in the remit of a fishery board to influence that and it was not done as a result of consultation. AS observed that the Scottish Government claimed not to have any money and then spent some on a project that will do something but not answer all the questions. SM

	<p>responded and stated that it was a block of European money that they managed to access. AS commented that ideally a couple of million pounds would be needed and that money is available if they discussed it with the right people. SS asked if the CFFB would be willing to become involved with the project. SM responded that it was a one off project.</p> <p>SS commented that it appears from earlier discussions that netting has made very little impact on the fishings and in Ireland, where netting has been stopped, there are no more fish being caught in the rivers. Has the Board done anything to support the netmen and is the Board against the moratorium, and if not, why not? This science is a prime example of where the scientists could do something to support them. If the Board has not supported netmen in the past, could this be a way of doing so now by highlighting that this is not the most effective method? ID commented that over the years there have been arguments for and against netting stations in the district but no one knows the real effect with the evidence being anecdotal. If after the three year moratorium there is no change in the number of fish returning to rivers, after allowing for other known factors, then there is an argument to bring netting back. However, unless you carry out the experiment you don't know. The Board did not object to the moratorium but some members did. SS asked if there is no real effect on salmon stocks after the three years, would the Board be prepared to support the netmen's case? ID responded that, subject to the other known variables, he thought the Board would. SM mentioned that a lot of the netting issues come down to the Government's international obligations. SS was aware of this but is concerned that if they are not made aware, then the box will be ticked. IP responded that the latest project will tell them nothing; the tagging will not tell you how far the fish are swimming. It was originally proposed that the netmen would be participating; this has reduced to four observers.</p> <p>SM returned to the proposed works for 2017/18. This is well advanced with the smolt tracking, the schools programme up and running, further electrofishing and sawbills counts. Amongst the most important projects for the year are two on the Meig and the Alness (the Meig will be discussed later, but there is clearly an issue with smolt numbers escaping from the reservoir and an engineered trap is proposed with three way funding from SSE, the Trust and Strathconon Estate). Regarding the Alness, it has been suggested that a fish counter could be installed in the weir; this could help with future categorisation of the river. John Armstrong from Marine Scotland has looked at the weir and believes it is a possibility. Further research is required and then an approach can be made to the two distilleries. The weir would have to be heightened with a fish pass installed with a counter. ID believes that the work would also benefit the two distilleries. SM noted that discussions will have to be had with SEPA and advice will be required for the construction of a fish pass. IM noted that at the last meeting it was mentioned that the AAC would be part of any discussions around the weir. To date this has not happened and the Club was not represented at the meeting with John Armstrong. SM responded that the meeting with John was to determine if it would fit with the Government programme and whether it was a suitable site. It was nothing to do with any impact it might have but as soon as it reaches the stage of engineers looking at it, the AAC will be invited to become involved. There has to be that first scoping exercise; nothing has been done that will affect the AAC. AS advised that Marine Scotland cannot advise on the fish</p>	
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	<p>counters and the counter being used by them is no longer supported.</p> <p>RW had an enquiry from the Ghillies; would there be a consideration for them to Floy tag the fish so that they could be identified when stripping for eggs and they could then be followed. SM responded that there are issues with putting tags in fish and that Home Office licences would be required. We would have to determine that there is a requirement to tag. AS commented that early running fish down at Pitlochrie are dying, partly due to being handled and partly due to warmer weather but Floy tagging could have an adverse effect on them if this was adopted. It may not cause them to have an early death but could cause problems. SM agreed that handling fish carefully is very important for catch and release.</p> <p>IM noted that there is a fallen tree across the weir; the AAC have contacted the Dalmore Distillery but they have not removed it. SM responded that he had spoken to the distillery and Board staff will help remove the tree at low water.</p>	
6	HYDRO REPORT	
	<p>AS reported on the hatchery; there had been issues with the water pipe but everything else seems to have worked well. There has been an issue with the supply from Loch na Croic to the filter station and the engineers have recognised that there is an issue there; the pipe is air locking when they clean the filters. SM commented that when the filters were back washed it caused an airlock but did not cause any problems for the hatchery. AS mentioned that there is a back-up supply which pumps water from the river should it be needed.</p> <p>AS continued with his report and commented that the University of Glasgow's team that SM had previously referred to is paid for partly by SSE, with SEPA also contributing. The survey was to look at how smolts get out of Lochs Meig, Achonachie and Garve to see whether there are any differences in behaviour, mortality rates and predation between the two hydro reservoirs and Loch Garve which does not have a dam.</p> <p>It appears that only twenty five percent of the smolts have found their way out of the Meig Dam which means something may have to be done to improve it. One of the key issues highlighted, that when the pit tagged smolts moved down from the Achanalt to the Bran, the survival rate through Torr Achilty is between three and five percent whereas coming out of the Meig it is zero point seven percent, i.e. only about one fifth. Moving smolts may be a solution. SSE is keen to try and help improve this as part of the Water Frame Work Directive. There is no fundamental issue as there are smolts getting through but it is recognised as being a problem.</p> <p>Fish counts are looking good with the most recent count for Torr Achilty being up on last year. The Ness have reported that they have large numbers of fish and their count has doubled. AS commented that there have been a number of fish dying on rivers in Scotland. SM responded that it did not seem to be bad on this system. ER asked that any member pass any dead fish found to the Bailiffing team for analysis.</p> <p>AS noted the biggest problem has been low water and the general lack of rainfall. Water has had to be moved around the system and the flow near the end of the smolt run had to be reduced as there</p>	

	<p>was not sufficient water available. It increasingly seems to be an issue happening year on year. RF commented that there have been a number of dry springs and the last ten months have seen average or below average rain fall according to the Met Office statistics. It is difficult to tell if this is a long term change or just weather. It would appear there is some sort of change. AS commented SSE will be meeting with SEPA to discuss the CAR licence numbers and the minimum flow from the Meig. RF stated that there have been a number of requests from Scottish Water and SSE to drop the minimum flow. AS stated that the storage in the Orrin was down to nine percent; after winter it should be at around sixty five to seventy percent.</p> <p>RW enquired if salmon caught for the hatchery could be kept in nets in the estuary to limit infection? AS responded that it depends on what infection they have but it may be impractical. SM noted that the underlying symptoms may remain. IP commented that they had tried this and the diseased fish had recovered within a week and they were taken to the hatchery.</p> <p>RF noted the good relationship between SSE and SEPA and commented SEPA are happy to discuss all the matters that have been raised. There has been a long discussion on smolts at the meeting and this is something that is being looked at; the science is only just starting to catch up.</p>	
7	TRUST REPORT	
	<p>AM reported that the Cromarty Firth Fisheries Trust is a charitable organisation which has been supporting research and education of fisheries in the Board's geographical area. The Trust was set up by Lord Nickson and now has an investment of around £350,000. This produces an annual income of £10,000 to £15,000 per annum but because of its charitable status, the Trust is able to punch above its weight and donated £27,000 to fund Board projects last year. Hopefully that will increase marginally.</p> <p>To highlight something that the Trust has supported, AM related that he had met some young children coming away from a day's fishing with Ed Rush. They all had huge grins on their faces, as did their teachers. They had been fishing and learning about angling and conservation work. The object is to kindle some interest and raised awareness among young people in fishing also to encourage them to be responsible anglers. The Trust will then put them in touch with their local clubs.</p> <p>AM noted that Ed Rush is now running the Bailiff training programme for Scotland.</p> <p>AM continued that the Trust would wish to support any work being done to transport smolts to below the Meig Dam; especially as it looked as though this could multiply the numbers of fish returning by a factor of five.</p>	

<p>8</p>	<p>WILD FISHERIES REFORM UPDATE</p> <p>SM stated that the Scottish Government has backed off from the large structural reform originally proposed but there are a number of elements of the report that will continue. The Government is keen to support better training for fishery staff, angling development and fishery management plans. The limited programme is still going ahead and in a response to the reform process, RAFT and ASFB merged to form Fishery Management Scotland. SM commented that we now know where we are and Fishery Management Scotland are keen to move things forward with the private sector.</p> <p>AC enquired if there are details of the proposals available. SM responded that there is a regular update on the Scottish Government website.</p> <p>RF commented that SEPA holds a huge amount of data on pressures on fish stocks and pollution, etc. Some of this information will be required for a management plan. SEPA will be running workshops later in the year in order to assist fisheries and inform managers of the data held by SEPA. This will be a substantial commitment from SEPA and it will be a one to one with staff. Fishery Management Scotland will also be involved. It was acknowledged that some of the data held has come from private sector sources such as the CFFB.</p> <p>SM noted that the management plan is very much about sharing data and it should complement and identify issues.</p>	
<p>9</p>	<p>UPDATE ON RATEABLE VALUE REASSESSMENT FOR 2017</p> <p>ID commented that the last revaluation was back in 2010 and noted that relative catches have changed over the last 7 years; this will have resulted in the basis for assessments being issued by the Board being out of date. Inflation has been around 20% over the period.</p> <p>The Board has received the data for the revaluation notices from the District Valuer and the good news is that the rate in the pound will decrease to 90 pence. However, there are proprietors who have benefited from this exercise and others who have not. The new assessment forms should be with individuals within the next few days. It was noted that, on the whole, increases have been below inflation.</p> <p>The Board intends to issue assessments on the new basis but only for the first half of the year. This will allow for any appeals and the assessments can then be re-based in October to balance the account should any of the appeals be successful. ID noted that anyone who did not file their catch returns for the re-assessment will have their rateable value doubled.</p> <p>NW asked that anyone wishing to make an appeal should do so as quickly as possible so that any appeals can be heard and concluded prior to the October Board meeting. This will allow the second half of the assessment to be issued without delay. ID supported this request. He added that, unless there is new information which amends the Valuers view of the data already submitted, any appeal is likely to prove unsuccessful.</p>	

<p>10</p>	<p>BUDGET FOR 2017/18</p> <p>ID ran through the proposed Budget for 2017/18 and noted that the assessment figure on the income side has been assumed to be at the preliminarily assessed rate of 90 pence in the pound. Total income for the year is budgeted at just over £270,000 and it is intended to spend just over £270,000. SM controls the budget on a daily basis and every element of cost has been looked at and it is a reasonable basis on which to operate and if we run as planned, the Board will come out just about even.</p> <p>AS asked if the £92,000 under the heading of SSE included the pit tagging work. NW confirmed that the figure included the pit tagging. AS stated that it will end up being slightly higher than the figure budgeted.</p> <p>RMF commented that he was not sure if this issue should be raised at the Board meeting but Bailiff Peter Macalister lives in one of the Novar Estate cottages and historically RMF paid half the rent (as the cottage was not owned by RMF) and the Board paid the other half, as Peter used to do work on the estate. The circumstances have now changed and Peter doesn't undertake any work for the estate. ID responded that it should be discussed separately outside the meeting.</p> <p>AS noted that £12,000 was budgeted for vehicle repairs and would it be more cost effective to get newer vehicles? SM responded that it included running a couple of old Land Rovers. The cost of purchasing or leasing new vehicles is expensive. With a lease you have to stick very closely to the contracted mileage and you cannot risk damaging the vehicle off road or significant extra cost can be incurred. SM noted that for the £12,000 maintenances charge there is a sizable fleet being run.</p> <p>ID stated that if anyone had questions that they think of after the meeting to get in touch via email or telephone to discuss.</p> <p>RW enquired about the Government Gilts and how the money originally got there. ID responded that money had been built up over many years as a financial reserve in the Board. When there was fundamental change in legislation proposed (which the Board supported) it was decided that the investment money should be transferred to the Trust as it would be safer being managed as part of the larger Trust portfolio. The money is returned to the Board through project funded work. He confirmed that the transfer to the Board was a one off.</p>	
<p>11</p>	<p>AOCB</p> <p>NW read out a letter to the Board from SC in which he mentioned that he had been up at Loch na Croic at the end of the trapping season and they had only caught five to six fish that day. There were only three hundred thousand eggs in the hatchery but at the hatchery opening there were still only three hundred thousand; in the board minutes it stated there were nine hundred and seventy thousand eggs. A request was made to see the records for male and female fish being caught and location. SM confirmed that the records are available and will be sent to SC.</p> <p>SM noted that the conservation policy for this year still needed to be approved. IM commented that the Alness and Evanton Clubs are still using tags. The AAC wished to put on record that other clubs are not</p>	

	<p>using tags and that the Board is losing control over the conservation policy. ID responded that there had been a fairly robust discussion at the previous meeting regarding tagging and ID felt strongly that it should have remained, but other clubs wished there to be less policing in favour of trusting individual members. Tags are a way of demonstrating to third parties that you are controlling the rod caught fish kept; it could help should rivers get re-categorised. All of the Alness proprietors decided to retain the use of tags. The Board had proposed that the number of tags per individual would be reduced to three for 2017 and a letter was sent around by the Clerk in October 2016. At the February meeting an argument from the AAC was heard and the policy was agreed at four fish/ tags per angler. This means that the policy is a maximum of four fish per angler regardless of tags or not. ID noted that the Board cannot mandate tagging without a Board vote. IM noted that with the proposals to recalculate rivers and the possible change in categorisation, it could have a negative impact on the Alness, therefore the sooner the Board can get a grip of the conservation policy the better. ID noted that it was very good that all the proprietors on the Alness are tagging, which should hopefully help.</p> <p>DS sees two issues; one is that without tagging, Bailiffs will not be able to identify if anglers are catching more. The second issue is there is only a three month period in which to catch the four fish after the 1st July with all fish having to be released after the end of September, this puts a lot of pressure on that period before autumn and this may affect the estimates for the fish returning and removing the tagging would have a detrimental effect.</p> <p>ER wished to thank the Loch Achonachie club for the use of their river bank.</p> <p>SS asked how the four fish limit will be monitored without the tags. ID responded that at the last meeting the clubs wished to trust their members to only keep four. SS noted that there was a lack of interest in being transparent within some of the angling communities but the netsmen are being penalised. SM agreed that this was an issue raised last year and was fully discussed at the time.</p>	
12	DATE OF NEXT MEETING	
	Friday 27th October 2017 at Torr Achilty Power Station.	

Conon District Salmon Fishery Board
Report for the period May 1988 to May 1989

CONON DISTRICT FISHERY BOARD

REPORT FOR THE PERIOD MAY 1988 TO MAY 1989

In general the Board has had another good year with even better sales from eggs and this has meant that the netting stations that were acquired in the last two years and the new bothy have been paid for without going into overdraft.

THE HATCHERY

Over 7 million eggs were stripped in 1988 with approximately 1 million fry being planted in the river system and a further half million taken onto the summerling stage also being planted out. Of the summerlings 216,000 were from eggs produced by salmon with 352,800 produced from grilse. The gross revenue raised from egg sales amounted to £192,000.

VERMIN

Between the bailiffs and the ghillies a total of 31 merganzers and goosanders were shot under licence from the Department of Agriculture.

28 seals were culled, 10 from within the Cromarty Firth itself, the remainder taken outside the Firth.

ILLEGAL NETS

19 nets were taken from the Firth and one from the river system.

PROSECUTIONS

Pending prosecution referred to in last year's report proved successful with James Robb being fined £100 for netting. Nine people await prosecution.

BAILIFFS

Edward R^Wosh is now the Superintendent, Mr. Campbell remaining on as a consultant. There are still three permanent and four temporary bailiffs. As will be seen from the pending prosecutions they have had a successful year though again there have been the usual problems with balancing the day and night shift patrols and there is a growing problem with the communications set.

THE FUTURE

As will be seen from the accounts, there is a small reserve despite the expenditure of the last two years and this reserve together with next year's assessment will see to the full running costs of the Board into 1991 without any egg sales from this coming season.

On the assumption that some egg sales are achieved, even half of what was achieved last year, there will be an extremely healthy cash reserve and this will give the Board the opportunity to replace the existing communications set-up and part may be utilized in a radio tagging scheme.